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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses the national emerging trend toward state intervention in local educational processes as part of the academic accountability movement. It provides examples of reforms and improvements whereby state intervention furnished local school improvement. The address focuses on state intervention in Jersey City, New Jersey; predicts the nature of change from local to state control; and speculates how local actors in the state of California will redefine their oversight and policymaking roles in the wake of such change. (JAM)

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Critical Issue Presentation
California School Boards Annual Conference
Los Angeles, December 9, 1988
Dr. John W. Duncan, Superintendent
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"ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND STATE INTERVENTION"

Academic accountability is defined for our purpose as the health, vitality and effectiveness of a local school district, measured by a reliable multi-item index. Our topic relates to the nationally emerging trend toward state intervention in local educational processes as part of academic accountability. Our knowledge to date relates to newsprint publications and periodical accounts, as opposed to hard research or complete case studies. There are a handful of examples of reform or improvement plans where states have provided themselves a role in improving local schools performance through state intervention. In addition, there are limited examples of educational leaders and legislators carefully examining and moving forward with this emerging phenomenon. As we will see, such examination and planning is the case in California. In lay terms, the basic question is: "Should failure of a school or schools to perform acceptably on a set of prescribed measures be grounds for state intervention in the operation of a local school district?"

In November 1985, the California Commission on the Teaching Profession, often referred to as the Commons Commission, published its

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report, Who Will Teach Our Children? A Strategy for Improving California Schools. One recommendation of that report called for intervention in schools "at risk" when a cycle of failure was found to be present:

> "School boards and district superintendents should monitor individual schools, paying special attention to those with serious problems indicated by the Index of Conditions. When the existing management team is unable or unwilling to take corrective action, the superintendent or the school board must be prepared to act on behalf of the students, parents, and the community and assume administration of the school pending selection of new management. Failure to make improvements within a reasonable time should constitute grounds for dismissal of the school principal or, when the problem is determined to be at the district level, the superintendent."

Let me acknowledge and express appreciation to those organizations and publishers that have dealt with the topic. Such publications as Education Week, Education USA, and the American School Boards Journal described, in brief, elements of state intervention in local schools. The American Association of School Administrators developed a position statement, the Association of California School Administrators, through a task force, developed a position on state intervention, including a model plan,

and the prestigious Commission on Public School Administration and Leadership developed a brief outline of their approach to intervention in their report, Return to Greatness. And most recently, the Office of Research and Improvement of the U. S. Department of Education has published a detailed report on the concept of accountability and measurement.

My presentation this morning will focus heavily on the highly-publicized and dramatic example of state intervention in local community education, that of Jersey City, New Jersey. Our examination of the Jersey City case and its current status may provide prologue to the future of change in local control and state intervention. Writers use the terms "take over" and "bankruptcy" to describe the intervention process, and even though these terms are provocative and in some ways descriptive, we should remind ourselves that we're talking about a process designed to move reform and restructure forward where all else has failed. The terms "take over" and "bankruptcy" receive great media and public attention, but they should not be totally accepted as synonyms for a program that carefully leads to state intervention and supervision of the public schools of a defined geographical area. We must remind ourselves, as we read, study and attempt to understand this emerging practice, that there are major differences between private sector bankruptcy where the business entity really disappears, and far less traumatic than the aspects of a military takeover, that is, there are far

fewer casualties.

In addition to describing the intervention status in Jersey City, it seems important that we focus on the entire concept of "at risk" schools and school districts; how they are identified; what this means for local control of public schools; and the status of California intervention planning. And finally, to develop a theoretical understanding of both accountability and intervention it will be important to examine the reactions of associations, organizations, and respected educational analysts who systematically recommend to legislators and other bureaucratic bodies on emerging concepts in education, such as our topic today.

The Jersey City Case. Let's turn then to the State of New Jersey and its currently unfolding effort to assist local schools, utilizing a state plan and state resources through intervention.

According to the New Jersey State Commissioner of Education, the "take over" law in New Jersey is only one part of a larger school improvement plan. In 1975 the New Jersey State Legislature passed a "Public School Education Act", providing provisions for a thorough and efficient system of public schooling for all students in that state. The program included the concept of school district "certification".

Recall that this action was prior to "A Nation At Risk" calling for school reform, and was New Jersey's effort to revitalize the teaching profession,

raise standards for students , and strengthen leadership at both the state and local levels. Again, according to the State Commissioner, the action plan was non-productive in only a very few school systems; in those instances, after years of state monitoring and assistance, the systems were not even meeting minimum state standards. The question was therefore asked: "Could the State of New Jersey allow a few systems to deprive their students?" The answer to that question appeared clear to the State Commissioner. School systems which had more than enough time to correct deficiencies required state help and if necessary, state intervention. The systematic intervention program became law in January, l988.

So we reach our first point of reference. Under the New Jersey Plan, if the State Department of Education determines that a local school system is unwilling or unable to improve and can document its case to the State Board of Education and, if necessary, the courts, then the state can take over the operation of the District and deal with its problems. It is the State Commissioner's judgement that takeover does not threaten responsible local control of schools. The act is reserved for extreme and unusual cases of school deficiency.

One parallel drawn between a school system "at risk" and a bankrupt business is apt. In both cases, the decay of the business or school threatens the people served. Takeover should be no more a threat to

healthy schools than financial bankruptcy laws are to healthy businesses. In New Jersey, state intervention comes at the end of a very detailed process where local officials have been provided every opportunity to take corrective action. Measurements and judgments for non-certification or preliminary "at risk" declaration involve specific attendance rates, percentages of students passing high school proficiency tests, and the existence of a local curriculum for every subject, from pre-kindergarten through grade twelve. In addition, a number of both internal operational and external social factors are considered . If the State Commissioner of Education decides that a locally developed corrective action plan is unlikely to lead to certification of a district, he will issue a "show cause" order requiring the system to explain why it should not be taken over and operated by the state. The school system can legally contest this order, as the celebrated Jersey City is currently doing.

How does a state-operated system differ from a locally-operated system? In New Jersey, the ordinary rules and regulations for running a school system are in abeyance for five years or until the system achieves state certification. As a result, the following actions occur:

- The local school board is abolished;
- The position of local superintendent and central office positions responsible for curriculum, personnel, business and finances are

abolished;

- A state district superintendent is appointed to manage the district;
- Within six months the school system's entire professional central office is reorganized;
- Principals are evaluated, using criteria proposed by the State Commissioner;
- The state-operated system receives current financial incentives, rather than the regular provisions of funding;
- Within sixty days of the takeover, the commissioner establishes a fifteen member local school board to advise the state appointed superintendent. The commissioner appoints thirteen of the members, and the local appointees designate two additional members;
- The advisory school board meets once a month with the state district superintendent;
- The advisory school board presents the commissioner with a written assessment of progress twice a year;
- The state district superintendent gives the commissioner a yearly report assessing the system's progress;
- During April of the fourth year of takeover, a nine-member board is elected from among the appointed board members; and

- The state appointed superintendent retains veto power over the board's actions until the state board of education determines that local control should be re-established.

Least we draw too many conclusions from this single intervention case, recognize that the Jersey City example is currently being opposed in the courts by the current Jersey City Board who desires to remain in office. In order to understand the basic significance of this partial case study, and to place into perspective the types of conclusions that must be reached prior to state intervention in New Jersey, we need to examine briefly the factors causing a determination of "at risk" in the Jersey City schools. The study process leading up to state intervention determined the following:

- The Jersey City District had a deeply-rooted history in governance problems, and that history continued to the actual point of threatened takeover;
- District employees were treated with indifference;
- There was widespread political patronage, nepotism, and union pressure used as a motivation in hiring, firing and promotion;
- State contract bidding laws had been violated;
- The district had repeatedly failed to meet state requirements in the area of academic performance;

- The school facilities were in a deplorable condition and constantly in need of repair; and
- Fiscal management had been inefficient at best and corrupt at worst, violating both district and state policies.

Most definitely the Jersey City conflict will be concluded as a landmark case in the area of educational reform via state intervention. I think, however, that one can conclude, even though the process is still incomplete, that the Jersey City example may not be a typical response in a typical school district in a typical systematic intervention process.

Other Cases. We must acknowledge that less flamboyant and more positive examples of state intervention in troubled school systems do exist.

A variation of the New Jersey intervention has appeared recently in Chelsea, Massachusetts, in which Boston University has offered its services as an intervenor. In most recent reporting, the Chelsea Teachers Union has declared "war" on the proposal to allow Boston University to manage the city's schools. The union, with the backing of the American Federation of Teachers, contends that in its current form, the intervention proposal would trample on teachers' rights and set dangerous precedent by placing an unaccountable private institution in charge of a public school system. My point in reporting the Chelsea experience is merely to conclude that academic intervention in locally-operated schools is not an uncomplicated

task and promises a level of turmoil and resistance from many quarters.

State departments of education have intervened in school systems with financial problems in such states as Texas, New Mexico and California. In addition, examples of limited intervention for academic deficiencies, not to be confused with financial deficiencies, is found in Kentucky and an academic bankruptcy law was instituted in West Virginia this past summer.

The West Virginia approach may yet provide details and definitions of a clear procedure for academic state intervention that will be of greatest interest to educators and scholars. It is anticipated that in 1989 the West Virginia State Board of Education will receive the legislative power to:

- Declare a state of emergency in a school system that has been unable to meet accreditation standards;
- Remove the system's superintendent; and
- Assume total control over the schools.

And most finally, in reflection it should be pointed out that although Jersey City has received the greatest media attention, because of the current legal confrontation, there have been other instances in New Jersey communities where threatened intervention efforts led to improvement in local education prior to actual state control.

Measuring Academic Accountability. Changing direction for a moment, from the concept of "state intervention" to that of "academic accountability",

we need to explore how a declaration of "at risk" schools or school district can be developed and implemented.

A very recent report from the U. S. Department entitled, Creating Responsible and Responsive Accountability Systems points out the absolute necessity of measuring academic accountability in our schools. The report focuses both on improving low achieving schools and further motivating high achieving schools; it further builds a case for a statewide accountability system and regular reporting to the public as important parts of performance improvement. Accordingly, four important parts of a statewide academic accountability measuring system include:

- Multiple indicators, not only on the status of students, but also on teacher quality, leadership, fiscal resources, curricula and community support;
- Indicators aligned with goals of the state and realities of the district and not limited to achievement tests alone;
- Measurements that provide districts and schools uses for the accountability data beyond reporting the data to the state; and
- Multiple criteria to identify low performing schools in districts that provide for the recognition of community divergence.

This report also concludes that the appropriate intervention of a state agency at the local level should and must be preceded by adequate and

multiple opportunities for local districts to improve their own status.

It's interesting to note, in line with this recent accountability document, that the New Jersey certification model monitors its schools on fifty-one indicators. Limited research indicates that over half of the states are exploring the areas of accountability measurement with sanctions; while another quarter of the states are assuming responsibility for the design and implementation of an accountability measurement system, without state policies related to sanctions or state intervention.

Organization Reactions. Turning to the actions and reactions of administrator and school board associations, it is interesting to note that much of the proactive interest comes from those alliances. As state intervention becomes a very serious topic in public education, the American Association of School Administrators Executive Committee adopted a position on educational bankruptcy:

> "AASA believes that schools experiencing problems caused by lack of community support in providing adequate funding or severe lapses in student performance should receive significant assistance from the state. However, the school should not be declared 'educationally bankrupt' and taken over by the state until all reasonable options have been explored. While local control of the school is important, student achievement is

essential to the future of each community, state and the nation. Therefore, each state should develop a program to assist the schools, not take them over."

It is my understanding that the California School Boards Association, early in 1989, will meet to discuss the various approaches to academic accountability, models of intervention programs, decision-making responsibilities, parental choices in our schools, high risk students, early identification, and productive staff development for the schools in California.

The Association of California School Administrators, in providing their guidelines to an actual academic intervention model, suggested a three-tier approach to the process, should state intervention become necessary. That approach involves:

- Step 1: A voluntary local action plan should be developed and implemented; the plan should clearly recognize and define the problem and include specific actions to be utilized at the local level to improve the schools' performance; if non-productive over time, then
- Step 2: A prescriptive approach to performance improvement, involving the district's school site personnel and an external assistance team with notification of the district's actions to the Superintendent of Pubic Instruction; again, if non-productive over

time, then

- Step 3: The Superintendent of Public Instruction would appoint a qualified individual, recognized as an experienced educator to serve as state monitor. This individual would effectively become the trustee in the intervention phase, and the district would be evaluated at the end of a two-year period. If the monitor believed that the intervention phase should be continued, he or she would be required to submit that request to the State Board of Education, at which time the school district would also have the opportunity to justify return to local control.

The ACSA Task Force not only suggested a three-tier approach to intervention, they also developed a series of belief statements concerning intervention and identification of schools "at risk". These "belief statements" include:

- Superintendents and administrators should be held accountable for the management of the schools with other staff sharing accountability for the quality of instruction provided to students.
- All students can learn when schools provide a positive learning environment with dedicated and committed administrators, teachers and support staff.

- Schools alone cannot resolve or be accountable for all social, economic, and environmental obstacles which students face.
- Successful schools and successful students are the products of partnerships among parents, school board members, community members, the business community, teachers, administrators and support staff.
- Administrators and other staff should be provided with authority and resources commensurate with their responsibilities.
- If students "at risk" are going to have an equal educational opportunity, they must be given priority for state and local resources.
- Achievement scores alone are insufficient measures of student success and performance.
- The tools of evaluating progress should incorporate longitudinal measures such as student demographics, transiency rates, attendance rates, drop out rates, and expenditures per pupil.
- External advisory and assistance teams should be composed of experienced educators who have been successful in a similar school or district situation.

Concerning the very important procedure of identifying "at risk" schools, the ACSA task force stated:

- The act of identifying schools "at risk" should begin at the local level, with each district developing a set of indices to assess the performance of its own component schools.
- The final identifying factors for schools "at risk" should provide a complete profile of a school, both internal and external.
- The many fallacies of CAP scores should be recognized, and the use of CAP scores should be balanced by other indices.
- A technical advisory committee should identify and define measures of progress at the same time as the "at risk" indices are created, in order to ensure a widely understood definition of improvement.
- Several potentially negative consequences for the labeling of low-performing schools should be carefully anticipated. These include the possible exodus of large numbers of students due to parental displeasure, lowered staff morale, and student unrest.

A Commission Report. The prestigious Commission on Public School Administration and Leadership, in its recent report Return to Greatness - Strategies for Powerful Improvements in Our Schools, spoke in some detail of an "assistance" model. They describe this concept as a partnership between local school districts and the state. They further describe an approach to coordinate and apply additional resources at the district or local

site level, where ongoing educational failure is recognized. Their concept of an assistance model, or intervention if you will, is simple and direct. Their proposed process to provide assistance to "at risk" schools unfolds in the following sequence:

In Stage One, a local district failing to meet performance expectations over a period of time would become eligible for assistance. Assistance could be focused on one individual school or on several schools. In order to receive assistance, the local district would notify the State Department of Education that a particular school or schools was defined "at risk" as a result of consistently failing to meet performance standards. As a condition of state assistance, the local district would be required to permit state oversight and to accept the potential for shutting down a non-performing school after a reasonable effort to improve. Initially, an assistance team selected from exemplary schools would work in an advisory capacity with local school leaders. Special funds would be made available for planning purposes. The goal would be defined as immediately raising performance levels and a review would be undertaken after one year. In Stage Two, if substantial progress was not achieved in the one year period the assistance team would return to the school and revise the action plan. The revised action plan would be implemented and evaluated at the end of the second year. And finally, after two years, and as Stage Three, if substantial progress was not

achieved, the local district would have three options:

- Select a state-approved trustee with wide-ranging authority to manage the local school. This trustee would have the authority to override decisions of the superintendent and school board that were deemed contrary to the improvement of the schools; or
- The district could acknowledge publicly that sufficient progress had not been made at the school and provide parents with the option of transferring children from the "at risk" school to any other school in the district; or
- In the final alternative, the school board could close the school for one year or more, transferring all students to other schools within the district or to a neighboring district, if necessary.

The assistance team, identified during Stage One, would assume greater authority after the second year. They would have the right to make personnel transfers or changes, override union contract provisions other than due process, and alter school board policies that were identified as inhibitors to local effectiveness.

The Commission's assistance model provides additional resources to allow a local district to identify and improve local schools and in a most positive way, it keeps the focus of responsibility at the local level as opposed to an oversight role removed from the community.

California's Action. Having briefly examined the most heavily-publicized intervention case in the nation; and having indicated there are other examples of states that have intervention techniques with positive results; and having reviewed briefly the positions of associations and recommendations of commissions, it seems important that we look at the status of a proposed state intervention law in California and examine the elements of what some feel may be a process leading to a productive intervention program.

Serious consideration of California's plan for state intervention in "at risk" schools took place during the course of the 1988 legislative session. The first state intervention bill was introduced as AB 3419, and was co-supported by both the Governor and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. As originally written, the legislation was interpreted by many as a very severe, top down approach to school improvement, but when finally signed by the Governor as Assembly Bill 9, we found a far less threatening effort. According to Assembly Bill 9's author, "The bill represents the critical first step toward identifying, assisting and holding accountable the state's 'at risk' public schools."

Essentially, this statute establishes a thirteen member task force composed of administrators, teachers and others who would develop model criteria for identifying problem schools, accompanied by a plan to help them

improve. This task force must issue its recommendations early in 1989, and the plan must receive legislative approval before implementation. Reportedly the State Superintendent is currently in the process of moving toward a system of identifying "at risk" schools and identifying methods of offering help.

Local Control. My comments on the topic of academic accountability and state intervention would be incomplete without exploring the historical context of local control in the operation of public schools in California. Research indicates little discussion or concern in any of the reports, publications, or news accounts related to the legal and ethical role of the elected governing board in any design of state intervention. Most generally we recognize that local school board members, acting as a body, and in their role as trustees, are expected to focus their attention on a vision of success for their local schools. Historically, locally elected school boards employ superintendents to provide administrative leadership and bring to reality their desires for the education of their constituency children. It is expected that such a vision is embraced by the local community, and the design calls for recourse by the local community if dissatisfaction exists.

Most educational scholars recognize the role of locally elected boards as that of reflecting community expectations within state law, and providing for the employment of staff and adoption of programs that at best give birth

and life to a successful school district. It appears certain that when that vision of local government fails, the emerging concept of state intervention will become real.

California's system of schooling today is generally regarded as being under heavy "state control". The historical perspectives leading to that recognition are many, but a brief review may be important. If one looks back on California's public education structure, searching for the "glory years" of leadership, where the major part of our nation looked to us for example, you discover very different governance, management, teaching acts and relationships than exist today. Most truly, in those years, the functional operation of public schools was locally controlled, locally led, and displayed purposes and responsibilities clearly defined. Standards of accountability and expectations varied from community to community, and there was limited, but well defined, state educational policy.

There can be no question that the State Department of Education, the Public Employment Relations Board, and numerous state level educational bureaucracies, such as the Credentials Commission, have all become very powerful entities, who impose tight limits on local school operations and involve not only restrictions, but prescriptions. It seems safe to reach a conclusion that we have yet to establish an appropriate and productive balance between state control and local discretion, in the operation of our

public schools in a changing California.

In many respects the current planning for a program of state intervention in the operation of troubled local schools is a natural flow of change experienced over the last two decades. Indeed, this approach may be clearly the beginning of another wave of reorganization and reform.

Pinpointing the causes of current state level dominance is not difficult. Within the past twenty years we have seen a shifting of the source of funding public education from local to state; we've experienced a draining approach to union-management relations; we've seen a general decline in public confidence; we've seen generally weaker student test performance; we've seen troublesome international comparisons; we've seen increased numbers of dropouts and turnoffs in our student population; and concurrently, we've seen, whether cause or effect, a proliferation of state agencies designed to regulate or control local decisions.

Add to these happenings the visible power struggles within the legislature of our state and the accompanying disagreements between the Governor, the Legislature and the State Superintendent, and we find increasing regulation. In addition, local school districts have experienced an increase in partisan politics in local school district elections, as particular interest groups seek control.

It would be possible to conclude these comments depicting the change from locally operated schools to operation by a larger political network by simply accepting the concept that public schools have become a front burner political item, and thus a struggle for control and occasional paralysis is expected. Most truly however, the schools of California need a comprehensive mission statement clearly defining purpose, direction and goals while nourishing many well intentioned appetites.

The basic fact is that no consensus yet exists on the objective function for our public school system. We do not agree on how to measure the effectiveness of an educational entity, let alone its productivity. Without an objective function, attempts to improve or better manage a system this large and complex are as likely to be wrong as right.

Summary. In concluding this presentation and in summary, note that California's system of public education is generally recognized as being under heavy state control and direction. We have systematically seen local discretion decreased over the past two decades. The reasons for this present state are well chronicled and documented.

Most certainly, those professionally involved in the educational enterprise recognize a great range that exists in local conditions and needs of the children in each community. We further recognize the greatly reduced flexibility and methods to confront those needs under current conditions.

In the best of all worlds, the local educator and board member might wish that statewide agencies and institutions who do have legitimate responsibility for public education would be limited to setting expectations and standards for local districts and to monitoring and holding districts accountable for achieving the expected outcomes.

It seems appropriate to quote from Dr. Patrick Rooney's thirty-fourth Delta Epsilon lecture at the University of Southern California as he spoke generally to the topic of School Reform and in part assessed the role of local school boards in today's education structure.

> "Over the past two decades the local school board has moved slowly toward obsolescence. The recent centralizing of control and power in Sacramento has contributed to this reality. Accompanying the transfer of numerous financial and curriculum responsibilities to the State, there has been a gradual dwindling of interest in school matters by local citizens. Whereas past school board elections would usually draw a number of qualified candidates, there are many districts in California where elections were not held due to a lack of candidates. In conversations with likely candidates, who possessed excellent qualifications for board membership, a universal reply was that the tasks of a board member are too negative and thankless. Few people are

interested in dealing with such duties as closing schools, bargaining with the staff, balancing the budget and desegregating the schools. The comment of one board member who didn't seek another term was, 'It just isn't fun anymore when we have so little to say about the way the schools are operated.'"

As we move forward into future restrictions and prescriptions in the operation of local school districts in California, a fundamental question remains: "What is the appropriate balance between state control and local discretion in the education of each community's student population?" Possibly the concept of state intervention and a functional state-controlled school system is the approach to be considered. If so, intervention should be selective and corrective as tailored to a particular district and its unique problems.

And finally, what might be expected to be relatively rare and isolated instances of school or district failure, demanding state takeover should not be politically or professionally used as a basis for wholesale indictment and further regulation of other local school districts or schools, irrespective of their performance. And, parenthetically, many perform very well under exceptionally difficult circumstances.

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ABSTRACT

This case study exemplifies the particular challenges, successes, and failures a principal faced in coping with a small Catholic school's diverse problems and publics. Names were changed to ensure confidentiality. School policy and administrative leadership are discussed in terms of a principal's interaction with an embattled school board, skeptical parents, and dissatisfied teachers. Generally, relative incongruence among the school's varied socioeconomic constituencies--internal and external--is documented. Specifically, this paper describes the change strategies a principal used to stabilize an unstable school environment, including but not limited to employee dissonance, labor unrest, staff turnover, ideological confrontations about the direction of "professional" development, and racial disharmony. A mix of firm goals and expectations, conflict resolution, consensual decision-making, and task-oriented leadership behaviors comprised the bulk of the change strategies employed by the principal. (JAM)

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Principals' Principles as Roots of School Change

(also titled, "Turning It Around")

A Paper Presented at the 1988 Annual Meeting of the

American Education Research Association

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TURNING IT AROUND - ONE PRINCIPAL'S SUCCESSFUL STRUGGLE

Due to the coincidence, several years ago I was a participant-observer of one principal's successful struggle to turn-around a small, Catholic, elementary ghetto school. The principal was a Catholic laywoman, and the school's staff was almost entirely laypersons. The school's circumstances were, in many ways, similar to those of the public schools in the area.

The principal's efforts covered three years. They ended when she decided that her charge, from the school board, to transform the school, had been met. She then left for another job. I want to describe, in the limits of one article, how this transformation proceeded, and what lessons can be drawn from it.

Catholic school circumstances are, by definition, unique. But each public school,too, in diverse ways, has special elements. It may be: small or large; urban, suburban, or rural; and elementary, junior high or secondary. And other singularities can be found. However, despite such variations, some instructive common themes among many forms of schools can be identified. And my article will stress such points of commonality. Furthermore, there is growing interest, among public school educators, in the unique aspects of private and Catholic schools.[1] This study will help satisfy that curiousity. Finally, from my overall experience with turnaround situations, there are almost always peculiar challenges confronting the principal involved. Thus, any dissection of such an event will always require the researcher to derive general principals from unique circumstances. The fact that the school involved here is Catholic is only of the many forms of uniqueness which can affect poorly managed schools.

An accurate picture will compel me to wash dirty linen in public--as well as identify real heroes. Therefore, all names used will be pseudonyms, and other steps will be taken to maintain anonymity, without compromising this report's central accuracy.

The Setting

St. Nowhere's was a long-established parish school in a large midwestern city. The neighborhood was formerly white, but had gradually became all black. The matter of race was a significant element in the turnaround, and so will be recurrently mentioned as the description proceeds. Over ninety percent of the school's families qualified for Federal free lunches. The school had about 200 black pupils. There were eleven teachers and ancillary staff members, excluding the principal. Nine of the eleven were black. The community was afflicted with many forms of distress incident to such environments: single parent families, unemployment, gang violence, alcholism, drug use and crime. Most of the families using the school were sympathetic to organized religion, although the majority of them were not Catholics. Essentially, the parents choose St. Nowhere's because they believe it would provide their children with a better environment then the neighborhood public schools.

The relationship between the school and the parish church--and Father Dedicated, St. Nowhere's pastor--was significant. And, once the principal, Mrs. Turnaround, appeared, her relationship with the Father was also important. This matter of tranforming principals and their external allies should be mentioned here. In most popular reports of transformations, it

seems the principal is an isolated, heroic leader.[2] Such a picture appear generally improbable. First of all, when a vital new actor appears, we should suspect some casting director has also played a role--even if it was played offstage. Furthermore, as any vigorous principal proceeds in the face of opposition, commonsense suggests that some people in the institutional hierarchy are providing support and counsel, as well as resistance and indifference. Father Dedicated played such a supportive role at St. Nowhere's.

Father Dedicated was a relatively young, vigorous, religiously committed and semi-charmastic white priest. His concern for the poor of his area was profound, and widely respected. He had earned considerable influence in the community due to his virtues and energy.

Mrs. Turnaround's predecessor, Mrs. Beign, had been principal for years. She was a mild-mannered, benevolent, not-to-well organized black lady. Her key operating principle was to strive not to offend anyone. Her style was "consensual" in the worst meaning of the word. Mrs. Benign avoided making significant demands on the school's teachers. Partly due to such non-leadership, the teachers had developed a deep-set common body of clock-watching, semi-disengaged attitudes about their work. A number of parents, mothers who worked around the school to reduce their tuition payments, helped add to the prevading laissez faire tone. The school was partly a site for socializing between teachers and some parents. The learning press on pupils was very moderate. Egregious breaches of discipline (e.g., drug use around school by pupils) were rare. However, a moderate level of disorder prevailed, and fights among poorly supervised pupils in the playground were common.

According to basic diocesean requirements, the school was generally overseen by its own local board. Gradually, Father Dedicated had changed the composition of the board, until it was comprised of an all black group of relatively able persons, both parents and non-parents. The board, for understandable reasons, was dissatisfied with the operation of the school. Father Dedicated shared this frustration. He occasionally intervened to tighten school operations. His authority, however, was tempered, as a white person giving directions in an all black community to the black principal of an almost all black school staff. One place Father used his authority was in the area of teacher contract renewal--and this deserves amplification. Teachers in the diocese had year-to-year contracts, just as in public schools. But the diocesean contracts were "real." Each individual teacher's contract could be revised, in significant form, by the school, for the next year, for material causes. Thus, if a teacher was frequently absent, next year's contract might obligate the teacher to maintain at least 94% attendance the next year. Failure to comply with this clause would be a substancial breach of contract, and might justify discharge during the school year.

Father Dedicated, despite Mrs. Benign's indifference, attached conditions to several renewing teacher's contracts. Then, he finally determined--without soliciting the board--not to renew Mrs. Benign's contract. He believed the board would support his decision, but wanted to accept full responsibility for such dramatic action. He understood why the board might not want to enter into conflict against the amiable principal who had brought no conspicious disaster to the school, and who avoided offending the staff and certain involved parents.

Once Father Dedicated had acted, the board accepted his decision. It determined to conduct a careful search for a new principal. Their plan included bringing in a management consultant, to help them clearly identify their priorities and needs. This analysis led to the development of a written, detailed, clear and realistic job description, and a list of urgent priorities for the new principal they hoped to hire--tighten things up, and improve pupil learning.

The New Principal

Mrs. Turnaround was a middle aged white woman, with a doctorate from one of the country's top five universities. She had been a teacher in all grades from K to twelve, managed education programs (but never been a principal), been a college professor, and a middle-level bank administrator. Despite her experience and training, she lacked formal qualifications for certification as a public school principal; indeed, the diosese eventually had to temporarily waive some of its formal requirements for her to qualify for the St. Elsewhere job. Her job circumstances caused her to be looking for a principal's position at a relatively late time in the annual hiring cycle, and thus she was available while St. Elsewhere's thorough search was continuing.

The board, after several careful interviews--consonant with their deliberate planning--hired Mrs. Turnaround. They recognized the complications underlying their decision: she was not black, she had no previous principalling experience, and she was obviously a tactful but determined person with high standards. On the other hand, the board believed it was time for a change.

In her initial teacher contracts at the school, Mrs. Turnaround made every effort to listen and observe--and emphasize her respect for her predecessor and the achievements of the past. But, at the same time, she saw many needs for improvement. Teachers were often late for work. Pupil discipline was slack. Instruction moved at a lackasdical pace.

The Issue of Race

The efforts towards improvements were immenseley complicated by the critical issue of race. The pastor and the principal were white. The board was black, and almost all the teachers were black, as well as the parents. The division between the pro-change and status quo forces was not along simple racial lines. However, while the board knew the need for change, they did not have the time or qualifications to get closely involved in school site decisionmaking. Inevitably, Mrs. Turnaround became the point person. She saw parents, visited classrooms, supervised teachers, monitored discipline incidents, and basically ran the school. Thus, there was an inevitable potential for black/white polarization.

The pro-change forces realized that, if such a potential became an actuality, many indifferent and neutral blacks might be provoked to align with the status quo; not because they knew the details of each particular controversy, but because their racial identity was challenged. A major problem for the principal was to reorganize the school without such polarization occurring. Working with Father Dedicated and the board, Mrs. Turnaround gradually evolved a strategy: try and avoid too many fights at once, strive to keep conflicts on a technical and objective plane, make every

effort to stress alliances across racial lines, and make full use of Father Dedicated's stock of goodwill. Conversely, the aim of the forces of the status quo--which aim was usually more instinctive than deliberate--was to portray demands for change as racist and anti-black.

The potential of racial (or ethnic) polarization is a common problem in urban school administration--in either public or private schools. Whenever some serious dispute seems possible, whatever its objectual basis, there is the possibility that some group of allies (or demagogues) may develop along racial or ethnic lines. To my mind, this is one reason why such schools should be managed by members of the group involved--it is easier for them to fire (or push out) incompetent members of their own group. But there are innumerable other variables in such situations, e.g., the most objectively competent person for the job may be from another group, or an all ethnic school and staff may lack external credibility, or it may be good for pupils to see members of other groups in significant, proximate roles.

Many of Mrs. Turnaround's conflicts occurred around the issues of job retention and contract renewal.[3] The first confrontation arose during the late fall of the principal's first year. Mr. Marginal was the sole black male on the teaching staff. He had been there thirteen years, and was a kind, pleasant man. However, he was absolutely inadept as a classroom teacher, with no ability to present subject matter or maintain discipline. In the previous year, the pastor, as part of contract renewal, had required Mr. Marginal to sign a contract which obligated him to take several undergraduate education courses during the next school year. Father Dedicated (and Mrs. Turnaround) doubted that any such courses would stimulate notable improvement; however,

they saw the tactical value of making such a requirement. Mr. Marginal did not take the courses, probably for the same reasons he was not an able teacher: he was fearful of the cognitive and structural demands of the courses, and reluctant to risk change to keep a job he did not care a great deal about.

The principal, following due process to the uttermost, met several times with Mr. Marginal to stress the importance of his taking the courses. All meetings were supplemented with written summaries of their contents, written by the principal and delivered to Mr. Marginal. Mrs. Turnaround recognized that, despite Mr. Marginal's incompetency, some persons attributed a certain mystique to having black male role models in the school--even incompetent ones. But Mrs. Turnaround was persistent and tactful. Mr. Marginal displayed his customary courtesy, and admitted he had not taken the courses, and that he probably was not cut out to be a teacher. But no one had ever confronted him before. By Christmas, he resigned and found himself a semi-political job in the community, which was relevant to his interpersonal skills. The last Mrs. Turnaround heard, he was earning a better salary in his new job, and preforming at a higher level than he had as a teacher.

The next matter was more difficult. The principal had inherited her predecessor's secretary, Mrs. Bumble, who had ten years of service in the school. The secretary holds a critical position in most schools. He is the principal's representative to phone callers and visitors, and keeps track of innumerable records and information. A good secretary is more to be treasured than . . .

Mrs. Bumble was a friendly, disorganised black lady, who had been satisfactory because little was expected of her. Mrs. Turnaround found her sorely lacking in basic competency. She could hardly type. She could not maintain control over files, so parents and teachers would casually walk over and take out records for gossip or curiousity. The alcove to the principal's office was usually crowded with teachers, parents, and pupils (supposedly sent in for discipline), all hanging around and chatting with Mrs. Bumble and each other.

Mrs. Turnaround held a series of meetings with Mrs. Bumble to describe and justify her work standards. These meetings, too, were documented. Gradually, Mrs. Bumble came to recognize that Mrs. Turnaround had clear and firm ideas of the conduct she wanted, and her demands would continue and intensify. Mrs. Bumble found these matters too uncomfortable. She gave Mrs. Turnaround her resignation sometime after Christmas. Mrs. Turnaround, after conducting a thorough search, found and hired a competent black female replacement. The new secretary naturally awarded her basic loyalty to Mrs. Turnaround. The immediate area around the principal's office began to generate a tone of order.

Professionalism

A key theme to the school's restructuring was Mrs. Turnaround's battle cry, "professionalism." Because of her experience and temperament, it was an important element of her perspective. And it was anthietical to the environment formerly prevailing in the school.
This matter of contrast can be simply portrayed:[4]

Unprofessional status quo:

***Teachers work committment is low: tardiness, frequent absences, reluctance to undertake extra work, little planning for classes.

***Poor instruction: teacher sitting at desk, much seatwork for pupils, reading to students from textbooks, too much "down" time in classes, little homework or tests, no variety in teaching methods.

***Little supervision of teachers, and teachers resistance to supervision.

***Low levels of teacher collegiality and cooperation.

***Little sense, among teacher, that they have unique responsibilities.

***Reluctance to accept accountablility to objective standard or explicit, written directions.

***The proposition that the conciousness of being black was, in itself, and adequate measure of pupil attainment.

Changes toward professionalism:

***Improved teacher attendance and promptness, assumption of better-organized classes, extra responsibilites without quibbling, more serious academic planning.

***More active and varied teaching, planned homework, submitting lesson plans to principal for regular review.

***Principal acquiring more information about teachers' teaching through a variety of means; assumption that teachers will take increased supervision with comfort.

***More structured contacts among teachers about work issues, requirement that teachers cooperatively revolve schoolwide problems, frequent work-oriented contacts between teachers and principal.

***Teachers spend more time segregated from parent volunteers, teachers shielded from unnecessary intrusions, attractive teachers' lounge established.

***Principal's continuing insistence that (a) staff identify and satisfy objective standards--not only or so much test scores, but also matters such as attendance, diligence and collegiality, and (b) use of written materials to infors and direct staff, e.g., praise, instructions and warnings to individual staff members.

***Shift in policies so pupils were evaluated against realistic but universalistic standards.

The basic tactic Mrs. Turnaround applied in promoting professionalism was to model, herself, the conduct she desired.[5] She put in long hours, publicly displayed a warm, friendly and constructive attitude to all persons--including pupils--around the school, kept appropriate persons informed of her conduct, solicited advice, visited every classroom practically daily and endangered ones more often, treated teachers as special people, met frequently with individual teachers and teacher committees about work issues, prevented parents from casually visiting classrooms, and frequently articulated standards to all concerned staff. She stressed attaining timely obedience from pupils and teachers on all public occasions, e.g., orderly lines forming outside of school before entrance, students promptly and quietly filing in during assemblies, maintaining order in the playground. She observed, "If a teacher can't manage to bring his class down to the assembly on time and quietly, I wonder how things are being managed in the classroom, when no other adult is around to monitor the matter."

Black Pride

A critical struggle about defining professionalism revolved around the place of black pride (so-called) in the school--and the role of Mrs. Militant, a part-time staffer, and technically a non-teacher, who had a vested interest in that ideology. Mrs. Militant was poorly organized, feisty, elderly black lady, who had been hired about ten years back to teach black culture in the school. "Black culture" had evolved into a series of repetitious pantomines and slogans, reiterated in choral preformances by groups of students on diverse public and symbolic occasions.

Mrs. Militant used class time preparing pupils for such occasions, and the presentations, theaselves, absorbed much of the school's assembly time. Mrs. Militant's instructional schedule was flexible, and she was further prone to loiter around the school when not actually on the job. She covered classes while teachers were otherwise occupied or relaxing, and excersised considerable unaccountable influence.

Mrs. Turnaround realized that American blacks, like all other ethnic groups, had a need to articulate their particular ethnic identity. And the diocese, itself, evinced similar sympathies ways. But Mrs. Turnaround did not believe that black identify should ignore or extinguish the ties of blacks as Americans and participants in American culture. Thus, when she found the pupils were opening the school day by reciting a medley of militant black slogans (composed by Mrs. Militant), she directed the teachers to supplement this with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Furthersore, Mrs. Turnaround recognized that the school was a Catholic institution, and Catholicism is an interracial religion. Gradually, the ideological tensions around blackness became the focus of a power struggle between Mrs. Militant (and certain of the staff) and Mrs. Turnaround.

One eyeopener for Mrs. Turnaround occurred during the school's Christmas assembly. The assembly had little to do with the birth of Christ, or Santa Claus, or other Christmas themes. It was largely comprised of pupils reciting slogans and poetry about "I am black. I am wonderful. Isn't Mother Africa grand." On inquiry, Mrs. Turnaround found that the school had been having approximately the same Christmas assembly program for many years. Gradually, Mrs. Turnaround tightened her cords of discipline around Mrs. Militant.

"Discipline" essentially meant: more clearly defining her work hours and responsiblities; prohibiting her "hanging around" habits; and directing her to draft and submit a job description identifying her expected work attainments and their relationship to the general aims of the school. All of these discussions were documented. Mrs. Militant was eventually informed that, in the next school year, her contract would incorporate such changed expectations. Furthermore, due to "budgetary constraints"--always a reality at St. Nowhere's--her total hours of work and alloted salary would be somewhat less than the current year. Basically, Mrs. Turnaround was reluctant to pay anybody much money to simply have pupils go around reciting. "I'm black and I'm great."

After much tugging and hauling, Mrs. Militant decided, at the end of the school year, that she would not reapply for her position the succeeding year. The school did not fill the vacated slot with another specialist in black culture--though it continued to actively participate in the diocese's elaborate black history month program. In the next school year, the black militant slogans were abandoned as part of the school's opening ceremonies.

More conflicts

As disputes evolved around Mrs. Militant, another point of tension arose. Mrs. Challenger, one of the long tenured black teachers, found herself under increasing pressure from Mrs. Turnaround. The suggestions for improvement--or criticisms--she received were typical: more engaged and better quality teaching, greater committment to extra-classroom responsibilities, and less slander-mongering against the principal and the board's change plans. Mrs.

Challenge realized that she, too, would be confronted with a tighter contract for the next school year. Apparently, she decided to confront the issue via accelerating the struggle, while she still had allies around--like Mrs. Militant. She also found supporters among one or two parents, who were troubled at being asked, by the school, to help change their childrens' disruptive conduct.

After several documented meetings with Mrs. Turnaround, Mrs. Challenger went public. She encouraged a disatisfied parent to call the community's black newspaper. The parent told the paper that the school's parents were upset by an attempt by the new white principal and the pastor to push black employees out of the school. She said that parents would picket the school the next day to underline their protest. When Fr. Dedicated heard the story was coming out, he tried to discourage its publication; he felt it was objectively wrong and inflamatory. He failed; the reporter said he was too late, the story would run "as is" the next day. On that day, there was only one parent outside the school, handling out a poorly written leaflet. No one paid much attention to her, and several other parents went out to their way to voice their support of Mrs. Turnaround. The "strike" attempt expired.

Mrs. Turnaround determined to directly reply to this attack. She checked with the diocesean office, and determined that she probably had grounds to dismiss Mrs. Challenger during the school year for her insubordination, if her evidence about incompetence and insurbordination were sufficiently documented. Because Mrs. Turnaround has consistently outlined her requirements to her staff in writing, she felt she had an adequate case. She proceeded. While many of the teachers were sympathetic to Mrs. Challenger (because they were

against the tigntening up), they were reluctant to offer direct support. The board and the pastor were with Mrs. Turnaround. Her levels of parent support were steadily rising. Furthermore, it was evident that Mrs. Turnaround was no pushover. After a hearing by the archdicoese staff, Mrs. Turnaround won the first level of the discharge case. The hearing was not simply rubberstamping. It was thorough and relatively balanced. Mrs. Challenger abandoned her case, and took a full time substitute job with the public school system, at a higher salary. Mrs. Turnaround was amazed that the system hired her without even checking with St. Nowhere--her last employer, where she had worked for seven years.

Support

The school board supported the principal throughout these controveseries. Their most important support was in a tacit--but deliberate--form. Each year one third of the board's positions were up for election. Ordinarily, the elections were uncontested. The board, however, feared that the next election might include an opposition slate--perhaps instigated by certain teachers. To stifle this danger, the board adopted a resolution postponing the annual election for one year. This was to insure that no opposition slate was developed, and possibly manipulated into office by the dissatisfied teachers. Technically, the resolution may have been invalid--or maybe it was not in violation of the by-laws. In any case, one sign of the board's wisdom was that no formal objection to their measure was uttered; this would indicate there was no profound opposition to its policies. Still, if every parent and teacher received an nomination and election notice, an opposition slate might

have developed. The board's action was a clear sign of support for the principal.

As these conflicts proceeded, Mrs. Turnaround simultaniously was engaged in restructuring the school. Working with some teachers and parents, she began to develop a parents' handbook, written discipline code and teachers' manual. She started the formation of a regularly structured parent association. Teacher committees were established, and assigned defined responsiblities. Regular, purposedful all school staff meetings were conducted. (Mrs. Turnaround eventually discovered that the previous all school staff meetings--for which all teachers were being paid--had been solely used for social gatherings.) A deliberate analysis of the curriculum was gotten underway. A relatively elaborate system of pupil awards and recognition--for conduct well as academics--was designed and put into operation.

Mrs. Turnaround was specially concerned with school/parent communication. Under the previous regime, a small group of parents received a great deal of news about the school, largely due to their hanging around. And most parents received scanty information. Under Mrs. Turnaround, there were far more parent contacts of all sorts--phone calls, notes homes, a frequent and clearly written newsletter, visits to the school, diverse one-to-one/and group meetings, and deliberate observational visits by parents. There was no longer a small group of parents who saw the school as their second home. The majority of parents, however, now received far richer information. Gradually, a pool of supportive parents evolved who recognized the school's general improvement, though they could not always identify the administrative steps

which had brought it about. Other allies appeared. For instance, the parish had an alert black woman who was director of religous education. Her work often took her into the school, and she became an admirer and friend of Mrs. Turnaround.

By the end of the first year, two other mediocre (at best) teachers saw they would receive highly restrictive contracts for the next year, if they choose to stay. They finally decided to pursue other employment, compared to accepting such a contract, and being firmly held to higher standards throughout the next year. Throughout her whole winnowing process, Mrs. Turnaround strove to: present her requirements in a remedial light; closely monitor the classrooms of the deficient teachers; and constantly hold out her hopes for their improvement. But she simultaneously emphasized her responsibility to the board and the parents to establish significant standards.

General Considerations

Any examination of this school change case must touch on the persisting problems and opportunities which confront a school such St. Nowhere, regardless of the quality of its operation.

As a private school, it has a certain power to pick its students--compared to the public schools' "take them all" obligation. Still, neither Fr. Dedicated, nor Mrs. Turanround, favored being specially choosy; that was not their style.[6] And, as a matter of economics, the school was under presure to maintain and enlarge enrollment. Over three years Mrs. Turnaround only excluded seven children from school: perhaps three were turned down for

admission (since they, or their parents, were too disturbed); two were dismissed (due partly to their maladaption, and partly to parent non-cooperation); and two whose parents withdrew them because they were dissatisfied with school policies--which may have demanded more than they wanted to give. Whether these figures are high or low is a philosophic question. During the same years, the school had about 60 graduates, 70 new enrollees, and 30 students transferring out (who's parents were satisfied with the school, but who had to move, etc.). Putting it summarily, seven were excluded and a 160 came or left due to other circumstances. We must incidently realize the school did not have funds for certified and trained special education teachers, nor space for special purpose classrooms.

In sum, while the requirement that almost all parents pay tutition provided for some pre-selection, the school still dealt with a relatively typical (in many ways) population of low income parents and pupils. And general disorder was endemic to the whole neighborhood.

Because of the pressures surrounding many families, some parents were prone to overrespond to school-related problems. Such problems might arise around matters of discipline, in-class inattention (due to pupils' lack of regular sleep hours), or poor academic application. A typical example arose after the development of a school discipline code. The new code provided that any child caught fighting in or around the school would be punished. Some parents objected when their children were accused under the code. They would contend "He was only fighting in self-defense; the other child started it. Does the school prohibit self-defense?"

Mrs. Turnaround's answer was, "Yes, all fighting around the school must be prohibited. It is impossible for the teachers to maintain discipline if they must adjudicate the causes of pupil fights." Many parents readily saw her point, but some others--who had trouble controlling their own anger--were unsympathetic to teaching their children significant self-control.

Another matter was the religious component of the program. Mrs. Turnaround was a practicing Catholic, and Fr. Dedicated, as she admiringly observed, was a "holy man". The both believed that an important aim of the school was to encourage religion. Furthermore, many of the parents were religious, though usually not Catholics. They felt, "You can never give a child too much religion." The school had never been anti-religious, but its former unstructured organization had discouraged purposeful activities, either academic or religious. Mrs. Turnaround gradually set-about changing this. More regular Masses, and other liturgical occasions for pupil and staff were established, and conducted with greater structure and purpose. The school's religious program was also used as a vehicle for the general elevation of social conduct by pupils. In a variety of ways pupils were encouraged to engage in various forms of prosocial conduct, and such conduct was partly justified through religious precedent.

Personnel Policies

The matter of upgrading the staff provided another challenge. There, the school was faced with a variety of advantages and disadvantages. A prime problem was its low level of pay. Its entry level teachers' salaries, as in all diocesean elementary schools, were thirty-seven percent lower than the

comparable public school beginning salaries, and similar differences appear at all pay levels. As Mrs. Turnaround restructured her staff, her greatest frustration was in attracting able people. The problems she confronted apply not only to St. Nowhere, but also to many urban (and possiby suburban) private, or church-related schools.--and even some public ones.

The school admittedly had a number of factors attractive for potential staff. It exercised some selectivity in its pupils, and parents engaged in self-screening; they would not pay if they disliked the school or its policies. Still, teachers did not have to teach in Catholic schools in distressed neighborhoods to take advantage of such benefits. (One evening, I drove though the neighborhood with Mrs. Turnaround. I mistakenly drove down a wrong street, three blocks from the school, but off main traffic arteries. She urged to quickly drive off this street; I could preceive her palpable fear of a potential assault. Many teachers would rather not work in such an environment.)

The school had an attractive potential for cohesion among the staff: cooperation and supportive relations were stressed. These virtues were assisted by the school's lack of a teachers union or formal tenure, and the principal's power to add new provisions to each year's contract. These factors encouraged principals and teachers to move towards both collegiality and paternalism (although senior teachers could be discharged only for cause after careful diocesean scrutiny, and even revision of individual teacher contracts to deal with particular problems required justification).

The religious aspect of the school provided explicit recognition for the moral dedication which many persons bring to work in education. Like many

other Catholic schools, St. Nowhere was also smaller, and less subject to external control than most public schools. It is evident that many educators prefer to work in such intimate climates. But the maintenance of humanism also provides a challenge. Such schools often ask more investment from their staffs--so they have the time to treat each other humanely. A final advantage to the school's recruitment and hiring policies was that it could apply a far more sensitive hiring process than do many public schools.[7] Pre-hiring investigations and interviews gradually became a major aspect of Mrs. Turnaround's work. She realized the easiest way to handle incompetent people was not to let them come in. And she also knew that, if one really digs, the relative truth about applicants can be discovered.

The relationship between St. Nowhere and the diocese was also of interest. Many observers have remarked that Catholic school systems have a leaner administration structures than most public school systems. And this was true here. Due to this structure, more policy decisions were made in the school and the parish--partly because parishes, traditionally, largely funded their own schools. Thus, they were allocated the authority to manage them. Furthermore, teachers were hired by individual schools; they had no diocese-wide transfer status. However, the diocese did supply certain subsidies to St. Nowhere, due to its distressed circumstances. The matter of which schools received such support was a sensitive question--though the apparent energy and talent of Fr. Dedicated and Mrs. Turnaround strengthened their case for supplementary support from the diocese. Diocesan staff were also available for support and advice, and there were certain generally applicable checkpoints. Furthermore, Catholic schools in each diocese were divided into local councils, and the principals involved met as support groups.

Another matter of administrative resources should be mentioned. Catholic school systems generally have less central staff than public ones. But there are fewer teachers per principal in urban Catholic schools, since Catholic schools are smaller than most public ones. It is not clear whether the total proportion of Catholic administrators (including principals) is lower or higher than the public proportion; but it is clear that there are more managers close to work sites.

Final Outcomes

By the beginning of Mrs. Turnaround's third year, two of her original staff of eleven were left. Her staff now totalled twelve (including ancillaries); nine of them were black.

There had only been one discharge--Mrs. Challenger--but all the others had left, or decided not to come back the next year, under some form of pressure. The school was generally operating in a much tighter fashion, and most faculty members were gratified with what was occurring. While Mrs. Turnaround was still troubled with some of her staff's limitations--their lack of commitment and imagination--she felt significant improvement had occurred.

During the second year, Fr. Dedicated's religious order determined to transfer him from the parish at the end of the school year. Such transfers are a common practice in most religious orders, and Fr. Dedicated had already served longer in the parish than was typical in his order. Indeed, despite his deep committment, he was perhaps not entirely unhappy to contemplate a contrasting responsibility.

The next year's pastor was Fr. Meddlesome, someone already familiar to Mrs. Turnaround. He was quite different from Fr. Dedicated. He adopted a populist and even politically radical posture, which might appeal to some people in the community. However, he was an inadequate listener, weak on judgment and enthusiasm, and not terribly responsive to local people. The principal realized how fortunate she had been in coming to office during Fr. Dedicated's tenure; and, indeed, even benefitting from the knowledge and status his experience had earned. If she had been hired with Fr. Meddlesome in charge, the effort might have been a disaster.

Mrs. Turnaround served out her third year under Fr. Meddlesome. While her association with him was sometimes frustrating, given her established status she could handle her end of the relationship. She made a determined effort to institutionalize the changes she had helped to implement. She particularly relied on the parent group she had helped to organize and her pool of relatively able teachers. During this third year, she concluded that she had satisfied her initial transformation charge from the board. In addition, the burden of being a white manager in a black school and community was trying. One had to perpetually watch one's flanks against demagogic charges of racism. Furthermore, due to her noteworthy record, she was a likely job candidate for a principalship in a more affluent and stable parish--someplace where one could feel the orgainzation would get along fine if one had to leave.

During her third year, she gave notice to the parish and school, and set about finding a new principalship in the Catholic system. She stayed in that system partly due to her taste, and partly because she could not be considered

as a principal by a public school unless she took about six additional courses (on top of her doctorate). St. Nowhere and its school board set about looking for her replacement. The search was conducted with far less efficiency than the search which discovered Mrs. Turnaround; much of the inefficiency was due to tension between Fr. Meddlesome and the board, partly because of his irrascible style. Eventually, a replacement was hired at the last minute. Mrs. Turnaround, meanwhile, found her new job in a desirable school and parish, but with plenty of challenges of its own. She is still working there, a much respected leader. The new St. Nowhere principal, an erratic and arbitrary young male, lasted only a year, and left to the mutual satisfaction of all concerned. St. Nowhere then acquired its third principal in three years.

One measure of the decay which occurred in the school over a few years was the impossibility of Mrs. Turnaround's obtaining the school's pupil reading score records from her period of service. I asked her to obtain them as data for this article--she clearly recalled there had been a definite improvement, but agreed that the exact data would be relevant. She contacted the present St. Nowhere principal, who was cooperatively disposed. The principal apologetically disclosed that the files in St. Nowhere had been so disordered during the successor's one year tenure that no back reading score data could be discovered. Mrs. Turnaround was surprised and distressed; when she left, the files were in scrupulous order.

Some Interpretations

Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War, written in about 410 B.C., described the famous funeral oration delivered by Pericles, the Athenian leader, honoring the Athenian dead in the War. In his oration, Pericles invited his listeners to look upon the great art and beauty which filled Athens, and to "reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty, and keen feeling of honor in action that men were enabled to attain all this. . ."

When I consider the story of St. Nowhere, I have reflections somewhat similar to those attributed to Pericles. It took an extrordinary level of heroism to bring about improvement--even if temporary--in the school. Nothing compelled the school board, Fr. Dedicated, or Mrs. Turnaround to take the risks they did. The school faculty and parent aides would have only been too happy to accept a new principal dedicated to mediocrity; instead, Mrs. Turnaround opted for a course which promised her pain at best, and the threat of unemployment. And neither Fr. Dedicated or the board had the least material benefit to gain. The causes for these heroic acts were noble, amorphous and powerful.

And make no mistake, the changers accepted deep stress, if not physical danger. Mrs. Turnaround told me that, the night before the newspaper article about her supposed racism was to run, she was on the edge of tears and sick to her stomach. She did not wish to be publicly labelled as a racist running an all-black school, and confronted with a parent strike. The evaluative meetings with her staff--especially the one-to-one meetings--were also exhausting. Staff members were shocked at being told--even in courteous terms--that they were not teaching competently. Indeed, the very idea that

were to receive any serious written evaluations at all of their work was a profound affront. During her first year, Mrs. Turnaround probably held about thirty-five such meetings. The task of being tactful, low-key but determined, was demanding. Mrs. Turnaround's original aim was to earn an honorable living, and conduct a well-run school. She was amazed to discover what determination it took to hold to such goals in the environment she accepted. But she stuck to her guns. And so did Fr. Dedicated and the school board. And, gradually, so did more parents.

From my studies of numerous school situations, I believe that other principals who have turned around disordered or mediocre schools have displayed courage to approximately the same degree. And, like Mrs. Turnaround, once it's over, they don't think it is profitable to go around rehashing old battles. But, as Pericles emphasized, at some deep level, all of us must keep in mind the courage of the people who have won for us many of the education attainments around us. And also the battles which have been--and are being--sidestepped by many of their colleagues.

The brute facts are that, before Mrs. Turnaround arrived, the St. Nowhere teachers were not paid very much, were not working very hard, and were getting most of their work satisfactions from their low demands and the social congeniality of their peers. Mrs. Turnaround proposed that everyone work hard earn the same low pay, and receive their gratifications from work support of their peers, and the efficacy of their teaching. The strenuous resistance of the staff to such radical change was quite predictable. So top-down reform was critical. The whole situation is simply an extreme instance of what I call "Wynne's law." When a new principal arrives at a disordered school, one

third of the staff will support necessary changes, one third can be won over via persuasion, and one third of the staff will have to leave before the changes can be carried through. It is naive to assume that a community of disordered employees will generally support the changes needed to create order and efficiency. It is significant that some authorities have argued for more consensual approaches to school management than Mrs. Turnaround applied.[8] But such proposals tacitly assume some basic body of common values among school faculty and administrators. And when values are relatively congruent, consensus may be feasible. However, when value dissonance is high, or the basic consensus (e.g., an antipathy to professionalism) is inherently undesirable, leadership requires a willingness to engage in direct, tactful but firm confrontation. Otherwise, there will simply be a consensus to stay mediocre: and this is the case in too many schools.

It is distressing to note the relative decline of St. Nowhere after the exit of Mrs. Turnaround and Fr. Dedicated (and the arrival of Fr. Meddlesome). Some analysts might interpret this as a deficiency in the change plan they implemented. I prefer another theory. The school's external environment was--and is--extremely unstable. A series of fortuitous circumstances enabled things to come together. But, once this mix of right people moved on, there was simply not a large enough pool of potential leaders to maintain a powerful institution, given the extraordinary pressures of the school. In other words, in exceptionally marginal situations, only continuing superior leadership will make things work.

Peracriptive Measures

We should revive an ideas that floated around a while ago--combat pay for exceptional teachers and administrators who choose to work in very difficult schools (either public or private). Such measures should carefully describe the traits of the persons eligible, or the productivity targets they must meet. These persons must be provided with extra authority, e.g., exemption from civil service rules or the union contract. They must show results in some reasonable period of time, or someone will take their place. (As one semi-precedent, I understand that the teachers union contract with one major city provides the system with special freedom to transfer staff around in the fifty system elementary schools with the lowest reading scores.)

The proposal for combat pay simplies applies to education the general principles prevailing almost everywhere else in society--including the helping professions. If someone is really ill we get a first rate doctor, and assume that, in some way, this will cost more. And, since the kids around St. Nowhere are obviously in danger, they need extra-able teachers, and we should offer to hire them. Remember, I am not talking about more adults per school, or automatic raises for all teachers now working in difficult neighborhoods. I mean more money to better people--and this may even mean fewer people than are now employed.

The concept cannot be perfected in two or three years. There will be "bugs". But the principle is worth taking time to develop. Unfortunately, now in some difficult schools, we are largely only buying adult time and warm bodies.

My other recommendation is that we consider revitalizing the ancient word demagogue. It was first applied by the Greeks, in about 300 B.C., to describe certain orators and popular leaders. Particular demagogues in Greece at that time attained great public influence by making slanderous charges against opponents, and by promising the populace--the demos--unrealistic and utopian benefits. The word has certain provocative connotations. It implies that many so-called leaders are largely in business for their own selfish good, even though they make a great show of caring for the masses. It also implies that, on some occasions, many members of the masses are prone to buy the specious promises and charges of demogagues.

Our Founding Fathers knew that the rise of demagogues was a basic course for the downfall of democracy in the Greek city states. The Fathers believed that demagoguery formed the greatest threat to the survival of the democracy they were creating. The history of the St. Nowhere situation--and readers can probably identify equivalent patterns in other education areas--suggests the demagoguery is still a serious challenge confronting education in our own time.

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3. E.M. Bridges, The Incompetent Teacher (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1986).

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5. For discussion of administrators providing teachers with models, see Joseph Murphy and Philiph Hallinger, eds., Approaches to Administrative Training in Education (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

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7. For one description of the current school hiring policies in New York City, see Dian Ravitch, "Tips for Rescuing New York Schools, "New York Times, August 21, 1987, p. 23.

8. For an example of a plea for a consensual approach, see, e.g., S.B. Bachrach and S.C. Conley, "Educational Reform, A Managerial Agenda, " Phi Delta Kappan, 67, 9 (1986): 641-645.